

Message Text

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42

ACTION NEA-16

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-11 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 OMB-01 EB-11 AID-20 NIC-01 DRC-01 /126 W

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R 051045Z SEP 74

FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1565

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EO KZURH

DIGN/A

TAGS: PINT, CE

SUBJ: GSL LIFTS BAN ON OPPOSITION PUBLIC MEETINGS

REF: A) COLOMBO 1099, B) COLOMBO 2460

1. SUMMARY: GSL ON SEPT 3 LIFTED BAN ON PUBLIC MEETINGS OF OPPOSITION UNITED NATIONAL PARTY (UNP) REMOVAL OF RESTRICTIONS WAS ACCOMPANIED BY PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY UNP PRESIDENT J.R. JAYEWARDENE THAT HIS PARTY REJECTS CIVIL DISORDER TACTICS AND HAS NO INTENTION OF ENGINEERING V PLENT OVERTHROW OF MRS BANDARANAIKE'S GOVERNMENT. TIMING OF DECISION ON BAN WAS INFLUENCED BY SEPT 6 OPENING OF COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION MEETING IN COLOMBO, WHICH UNP HAD THREATENED TO BOYCOTT. PRO-OPPOSITION SUN PRESS GROUP HAS NOT YET BEEN ALLOWED TO RESUME PUBLICATION. DECISION TO LIFT BAN WILL HELP RESTORE EFFECTIVE PUBLIC DEBATE IN SRI LANKA AND CREATE CONDITIONS FOR TEST OF UFG'S CAREFULLY NURTURED IMAGE OF MASS SUPPORT FOR ITS LEADERS AND POLICIES. END SUMMARY.

2. PRESS ANNOUNCED ON SEPT 4 GSL DECISION DAY BEFORE NOT TO RENEW EMERGENCY REGULATIONS IMPOSED APRIL 20 (REFTEL A) BANNING PUBLIC MEETINGS OF OPPOSITION UNP. DECISION FOLLOWS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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INTERMITTENT NEGOTIATIONS DURING PAST MONTH BETWEEN UNP

PRESIDENT J.R. JAYEWARDENE AND UNITED FRONT (UF) PARTY LEADERS, INCLUDING PRIME MINISTER BANDARANAIKE, IRRIGATION MINISTER MAITHRIPALA SENANAYEKE, AND FINANCE MINISTER N. M. PERERA.

3. DECISION TO LIFT BAN WAS DELAYED FOR TIME BY GOVTS INSISTENCE ON PUBLIC GUARANTEES FROM JAYEWARDENE THAT UNP WOULD NOT ENGAGE IN TACTICS AIMED AT PROMOTING CIVIL DISORDER AND VIOLENT OVERTHROW OF GOVT. UNP'S ALLEGED EARLIER RESORT TO SUCH TACTICS IN SUPPORT OF CALL FOR ELECTIONS PROMPTED CRACKDOWN IN APRIL, INCLUDING CLOSING OF PRO-OPPOSITION SUN NEWSPAPER GROUP. COMPROMISE SOLUTION APPARENTLY WAS REACHED DURING AUG 28 MEETING BETWEEN MRS BANDARANAIKE AND J.R. WICH LED JAYEWARDENE TO ISSUE STATEMENT AUG 31 STRONGLY DENYING INTEREST IN VIOLENT OVERTHROW OF UFG. STATEMENT GAVE NO SPECIFIC PLEDGE RE FUTURE UNP ACTIONS, BUT IT STRESSED APPROVAL BY PARTY'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF STAND COMMITTING UNP TO SUPPORT OF "PRINCIPLES OF PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY". LIFTING OF BAN WAS THEN TIMED TO COINCIDE WITH ANNOUNCEMENT IN PARLIAMENT THAT J.R. HAD CONFIRMED THESE SENTIMENTS IN LETTER TO MRS BANDARANAIKE.

4. COMMENT: UFG'S WILLINGNESS TO TOLERATE RESUMED OPPOSITION ACTIVITY IS BASED IN PART ON SURGE OF CONFIDENCE NOW PERVADING COALITION. ANOTHER IMPORTANT FACTOR IN DECISION TO LIFT BAN WAS ANNUAL COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION MEETING WHICH OPENS IN COLOMBO SEPT 6; UNP HAD THREATENED TO EMBARRASS UFG BY BOYCOTTING CPA SESSIONS IN EVENT RESTRICTIONS ON PARTY MEETINGS WERE NOT REMOVED. CURRENT DECISION CERTAINLY IS MAJOR STEP FORWARD IN RESTORING EFFECTIVE PUBLIC DEBATE IN SRI LANKA. RENEWED PUBLIC MEETINGS WILL GIVE UNP OPPORTUNITY TO CHALLENGE VOTS CAREFULLY BUILT-UP IMAGE OF MASS NATIONAL SUPPORT. STILL IN ABEYANCE, HOWEVER, IS RESUMED PUBLICATION OF PRO-UNP SUN PAPERS. UFG REPORTEDLY IS PREPARED TO PERMIT REOPENING OF SUN BUT ON TERMS THAT ITS OWNERS SO FAR ARE NOT PREPARED TO ACCEPT.
VAN HOLLEN

NOTE BY OC/T: MESSAGE AS RECEIVED.
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Message Attributes

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